



HIV Prison Advocates Applaud Assembly Vote To Make Condoms Available in California State Prisons

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LOS ANGELES –CorrectHELP, the largest provider of condoms to prisoners in the state of California, today applauded the passing of AB 1677, legislation in the California State Assembly that would allow health agencies and nonprofit groups to distribute condoms in California prisons. The bill now moves to the Senate.

"Over the past three years, CorrectHELP has distributed over 11,000 condoms in the LA County jails without incident. Condom distribution has been successful in prisons and jails across the country," said Julie Falk, Executive Director of CorrectHELP, the agency responsible for condom distribution in the Los Angeles County Jails. "We're thrilled that the Assembly recognizes that the spread of HIV in the prison system is a ticking public health time bomb, with implications well beyond prison walls."

California prisons house over 160,000 individuals who are at high risk of contracting HIV. The rate of HIV infection in California's prison system in 1994 was estimated to be 2.5 percent. That is eight times higher than in the general population of Los Angeles County which had a rate of 0.32 percent in 2000.

Assemblyman Paul Koretz (D-West Hollywood) author of AB 1677 underscored the state costs of HIV infections in prison. "Our prisons are HIV infection factories and we are paying tens of millions of dollars every year for not making condoms available. In addition to \$18 million spent annually by the Department of Corrections, once outside of prison the average cost of care for an HIV infected patient in Medi-Cal is \$23,000 per year," said Koretz.

Dr. Peter J. Katsufakis, Principal Investigator of the Pacific AIDS Education and Training Center at the University of Southern California is also a boardmember of CorrectHELP. "Condoms in prison save money and save lives. By opening our eyes to the reality of prison life we can take steps to promote a healthier future for inmates and the communities they join upon their release," said Katsufakis.

Mississippi, Vermont, the District of Columbia, and a number of US cities including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Philadelphia and New York allow condom distribution in their prisons or jails, as do most European countries, Canada, Australia, Brazil and South America.

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